

## Marlboro Conservation Commission Minutes for October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012

Those Attending ; Adam Gebb, Kristina Weeks, Sally White and Charlie Schneeweis.

We spent the meeting creating an overview of the steps taken and partners we worked with while creating the zoning proposals for the Wildlife Road Crossing Overlay and the areas 500 feet back from class 1 and 2 roads in the proposed Rural Residential District, and drafted this letter to urge the Planning Commission to support the revisions in the existing draft of the zoning:

Background; Marlboro has been getting developed in a random way with no plan in place to safeguard wildlife habitat. With global warming the need to migrate is becoming even more important as native species seek out suitable habitat in a changing world. It is very likely that unless the town plans responsibly, future generations will not enjoy the wildlife heritage we have today

In 2008 the conservation commission started making site visits all around town of locations that might be wildlife road crossings. Over a period of 3 years and many trips around town we firmly documented which locations were important. Some crossings received as many as 30 visits between the commission members and professional tracker George Leoniak.

Additionally we compared crossing locations with critical habitat such as wetlands and mast stands of Oak and Beech around town. Wildlife need to move long distances to meet all their feeding needs. They are keenly aware of when a certain food source such beechnuts are ripe and will travel far to be there right on time.

Any successful wildlife habitat network has to carefully protect both road crossings and feeding areas that meet wildlife needs throughout the year. Bears, Moose and Bobcats need to roam through many towns in order to meet these needs. So we studied beyond our town to make sure that the larger context was not missed. This included Newfane, Wardsboro, Dover, Stratton and Halifax.

The current science of habitat protection in the northeast uses bears as the indicator species. In order to maintain a genetically viable population of bears, a minimum of 120,000 acres of wild lands are needed. This is about the size of 4 towns. Since a good part of all towns are developed many towns need to have core habitat that is linked by road crossings. If we can save our bear populations, most of Marlboro's other native species will be protected as well.

In the summer of 2010 we had Jens Hilke from the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife come down to do a presentation and review our project. He is an expert on protecting wildlife habitat in Vermont and travels all over the state assisting towns. He re-affirmed that Marlboro is at risk of losing Bear , Moose and Bobcats and that our research was the only way to start.

In 2011 we started meeting with the Vermont Natural Resource Council (VNRC). They are the preeminent environmental group in the state. They have been assisting towns all over for decades with zoning issues as well as many other topics. We had many meetings with VNRC to discuss the details of what other towns in Vermont are doing and make sure that we were on the right track.

In 2012 our meetings with VNRC started focusing on how to translate our research into recommendations for the Planning Commission. Kate McCarthy and Brian Shupe their executive director put in weeks of work in this process, which included meetings with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife as well as the Windham Regional Commission(WRC). In the winter of 2012 the Marlboro CC, VNRC, the Department of Fish & Wildlife, and Dinah Reed, the WRC planner who has been working with the Planning Commission, conferred regularly on the project. The goal was to have a zoning proposal that was scientifically based and legally defensible. The Planning Commission invited Jens Hilke and Brian Shupe of VNRC help present the zoning options to residents, and those in attendance expressed support.

The CC goal is not to stop development but to make sure that the habitat needs of wildlife are considered when development is proposed. We are aware of many land owners that would prefer to not build in a mast stand or fill in a vernal pool if these features were identified on parcels they plan to build on. Site reviews are the only way to ensure that critical wildlife habitat and travel ways are not accidentally destroyed. Any delay in meaningful habitat protection in our town just makes the task more difficult for those in the future.

Jens Hilke says that it is unwise for us to leave so much road frontage out of the review process. Currently 80% of the town's road frontage is left out of the proposal. In the 20% included in the WCO, development would still be possible, but we at times would recommend that a house be sited further north or south (for example) so that wildlife could continue to migrate where they already do.

VNRC considers the proposed zoning to be a model that they would recommend around the state. It took years of research and meetings with top professionals in the field to put together and is based on science, not personal opinions or political views. The CC feels strongly that the future generations of this town would be grateful if we can succeed in keeping Marlboro biologically diverse and include Bear, Moose and Bobcat among its most charismatic residents.

The minutes of September 10 were approved with one change.....George Leoniak was in attendance.

Our next meeting will be on Monday November 5th

Sincerely,

Adam Gebb and the Marlboro CC

